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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [AM](#)
SUBJECT: OPPOSITION FORESHADOWS SHARP RHETORIC ON NK,
TURKEY; END OF NEAR-TERM PUBLIC PROTESTS

Classified By: AMB. Marie L. Yovanovitch, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Levon Ter-Petrossian's loyal lieutenant David Shahnazarian reached out to the embassy, primarily to urge us to disregard what we understand will likely be some tough talk against the government's negotiations on Turkey and Nagorno Karabakh (NK). He suggested this would be just for domestic political consumption. LTP plans this to be his last public rally for a while, and needs to go out swinging, according to Shahnazarian. END SUMMARY

¶2. David Shahnazarian, a close confidante of opposition leader Levon Ter-Petrossian (LTP), sought an urgent meeting with the Ambassador on October 14. He conveyed that LTP's October 17 public rally would be the last such protest demonstration that would be scheduled for some time, as the opposition strategy moves into a different phase. He said that, "to save face" as LTP managed this transition away from a public protest model, he would need to give his base some rhetorical red meat, but that we (the United States) should not take all these criticisms too seriously. He intimated that LTP would use GOAM negotiations on Turkey and NK as issues with which to lambast the current authorities. He noted that the government understood this.

¶3. (C) Substantively, he wished to assure us, LTP and his movement remained committed to positive negotiations on both Turkey and NK with continued U.S. and Minsk Group help as an honest broker. He highlighted LTP's record as president, whose administration was pragmatic and constructive on the Turkey and NK issues. Privately, he said he thought that the current moment was as auspicious as he had seen in a long time to achieve real progress on both NK and Turkey, in the wake of the Russia-Georgia crisis.

¶4. (C) Ambassador agreed that this could potentially prove to be the silver lining to that crisis. She strongly urged Shahnazarian -- and through him, LTP -- to be careful and constructive in their rhetoric on these issues, and not undermine what could be a historical moment to achieve important breakthroughs for the benefit of all Armenians. She said that the opposition did not want obstructing reconciliation to be its legacy, especially given LTP's previous record on these issues. She also cautioned that in a political environment such as Yerevan's, where there is very little trust, the government could very easily misunderstand LTP's intent and not see it as simply rhetoric to shore up his base. Shahnazarian hinted that despite the criticism, LTP would leave the current government sufficient running room to be able to move forward on these negotiation.

¶5. (C) Shahnazarian highlighted the government's continued detention of some 70-odd political prisoners (the Armenian National Congress officially claims 73) as the biggest obstacle to the LTP-led opposition's ability to move on from March 1 and act as a constructive opposition. He reported that LTP's base, and especially the family and friends of the

political prisoners -- a group which he said added up to some 5,000 passionate supporters -- brought pressure to bear on the Armenian National Congress' leadership to "fight" the authorities until the prisoners are released.

16. (C) Shahnazarian said that LTP would (unusually) speak from a prepared text. The draft is finished and is currently being translated into English and Russian. He said there would be "clear messages" for the United States and for the GOAM embedded in the text, which he felt we would be able to differentiate from the rhetoric he had urged us to disregard.

Shahnazarian said an English translation of the speech would be provided to us late Friday, even before LTP delivers the speech at the evening rally.

17. (C) COMMENT: LTP and his Armenian National Congress seem to realize that they have lost their popular momentum. Making a virtue of necessity, the group will call a halt to any more "mass rallies" before the dwindling participation becomes an embarrassment. We do not yet know what this "next phase" in the opposition strategy will actually be. Over-exposure has not worked to the ex-president's advantage, so we suspect LTP may withdraw himself somewhat from an active public role to re-cultivate his mystique, and work instead through surrogates and allies. We hope that this will mean a more constructive opposition engagement in political life.

YOVANOVITCH